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Foundations of Citizenship Education  
Reflections for 30 August 2006

Parker (2005), Haste (2004), Barber (1997)

1. No matter how often I follow politics and decision-making, I keep getting surprised at how much people are wrapped up in their own meanings and cannot even see when people agree with them, but use different wordings. This week's readings give another example of this development. Parker and Rochester agree with each other, but cannot get past the desire to find the other's biases. Parker was not downplaying the importance of knowledge learning as Rochester suggested. On the collegiate level, Rochester sees his students often for three hours per week, which implies, because he does not argue against collegiate setups, is sufficient to teaching people the knowledge necessary to develop effective citizens. However, at the K-12, and my experience is at the 10-12 levels, students are in the same classroom for almost double the time per subject. If three hours is sufficient to teach the knowledge, the Parker's ideas of giving students experiential citizenship learning does not impede the knowledge learning process, but instead uses the vast amount of time available to develop the same goals. However, Rochester and Parker are too wrapped up in their dogmas and criticizing the semantics of the other, that they cannot see the numerous places they agree. How many in the citizenry have begun to tune out the politics of the nation because they have become disillusioned by the bickering over semantics that makes up so much of our national discussion?
2. Parker and Barber both develop the idea of the idiot. While Parker develops the idea of the individual idiot, one who is concerned only their self, with examples like the SUV culture, Barber makes the case that the United States government, especially the politicians running it, are acting like idiots by concerning themselves with only short-term fixes that help their situation with no concern for the long-term impact of the decisions. Just as the SUV driver who has a vehicle that gets 10 MPG for their 50-mile commute to work has no concern for the overall environment and effect their "gas-hogging" has on the overall economics of the nation and cover this with arguments about family safety, the US government does the same in terms of education. Theoretically, everyone agrees that the future of any nation is found in the schools of that society. Education is the key to the future. As an educator myself, I here this from people all the time when they tell me about their views on education. However, as Barber points out, education is the least-funded and most scrutinized aspect of the governmental budgets. Building bombs and prisons are popular items for politicians, but do nothing to fix the problems the lead to the need for such items. The solution to the prison problem in America is in assuring a proper education for ALL students, however, this will take a long-term emotional and financial commitment from the nation, which is a nation that has never shown much long-term commitment to

much of anything. How long before this idiocy is solved and America begins to look to developing a strong future? Or, how long before the idiocy causes the nation to crumble? Where are we now? Who really knows, but it is never too soon to begin to look at the future and shape its development and leave fate outside.

3. As the previous reflections suggest, there are some very big issues facing the future of the United States. Barber states the government is only interested in “idiotic” short-term fixes to long-term problems. However, who is in this government? Politicians elected by the citizen/taxpayer (Rochester and Parker argue over the semantics of this, but the fact remains in America they are the same person). The citizenry elects the politician to represent their interests in the government. Since short-term gain is popular for all involved, the circle begins. The politician cannot ask for short-term pain for long-term gain because he/she will be removed from office in the next election. This continues repeatedly, which leads to no politicians being able to tackle long-term solutions. A possible solution to this downward spiral comes from Haste’s article about how citizens are constructed. The basis of the argument is that there is not a single definition of what is expected of citizens. The notion of citizen responsibility has been vastly different in the republics formed in the last decade after the fall of the Soviet Union when compared to the established republics of the Western Europe and the United States. Is it possible the solution to the problems facing the citizenry of the well-established republic of the United States are found in the actions and development of republican citizenries of Eastern Europe? If this is to happen, could Americans put their national pride behind them to learn from younger republics?